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PHILIPPINES

SUCCESS STORY

Stopping Trafficking, Saving Lives

Awareness is the most effective tool in combating trafficking



Photo: Kay Chernush

Trafficking deprives women of their freedom, their mobility and their physical safety

One woman saved herself from trafficking when she recognized the illegal recruitment practices from an awareness-raising exercise she had attended.

The lure is steady employment and a better life, but the result is often months or years of physical and emotional abuse. It's a modern form of slavery called trafficking — the use of fraud or coercion to recruit, transport, buy and sell human beings — and it entraps as many as four million people each year.

Fortunately, awareness is growing. In fact, the combined efforts of USAID, local government and community organizations recently rescued 250 women, many of them minors, from a “shipment” bound for a prostitution den in Manila. Authorities also intervened in an illegal recruitment scam involving 50 people who had paid outrageous placement fees for factory jobs in Belgium that did not exist. And a woman hired as a farm worker in a remote village saved herself from trafficking when she recognized the illegal recruitment practices from an awareness-raising exercise she had attended.

With support from USAID, the Trafficking Watch Group (TWG) was formed, comprising 17 national government agencies and 18 trade unions, civil society organizations and advocacy groups. Members of the Philippine government's Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking are represented and assist in TWG's efforts to combat trafficking on multiple levels. It has mounted a public education campaign, coordinated task forces, planned interventions and built capacity in national government agencies, organizations and citizen organizations. The group developed a Web site (www.trafficking.org.ph) and a database, along with a series of publications that include primers on the Philippine Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act in English and local dialects. To strengthen legal resources, TWG developed a sample ordinance against trafficking, which local governments have used as a guide to pass ordinances in Bataan, Cavite, Eastern Samar and Leyte — all provinces identified as source, training, transit and destination areas for trafficking victims. TWG also trained judges and prosecutors to improve their understanding of the Anti-Trafficking Act and local ordinances.

For trafficking victims and their families, TWG provides counseling, access to temporary shelters and economic opportunities. The organization is also among the forerunners in drawing attention to the problems that many victims — especially women — face in reintegrating themselves into their communities and is producing a manual to assist them.

Telling Our Story

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